

DISAGREEING WITH THE FANATICAL FOLLOWERS OF GURAZADA

I kept wondering for all my life-time: why do people carry Gurazada Apparao on their shoulders, showering the man bygone with the choicest epithets ever coined ? Why do they force us to accept him as a larger-than-life figure, some sort of a divine redeemer that has mercifully descended down on the Earth to lift us up from our dark hellhole of ignorance and depravity, a messenger direct from God ? What is humanly so special and noble about him, at least by judging him from the perspective of his own times ? What is that active part of his life that should make this grand Telugu nation indebted to him forever ? What is the particular instance of social change which we can not help squarely attributing to him ? A serious perusal of his literature and biography offered me no satisfactory answers, but presented me with more of questions.

It is important to understand that the ghost of Gurazada did not command this pontifical status before independence though he breathed his last way back in 1915. It was only after independence, during the haydays of Progressivism that this Gurazada cult came to be sponsored by successive anti-Hindu governments through language text books.

I am yet to discover what additional idea or ideal he preached differently from the essence of the standard smear campaigns carried out on India and Hinduism by the British, the Christian evangelists and more importantly, their pointman Macaulay. At every step, Gurazada sided with them in rejecting India's wisdom.

కన్ను గానని వస్తుతత్వము
కాంచ నేర్పరులింగిరీజులు
కల్లనొల్లరు వారి విద్యలు
కఱచి సత్యము నరసితిన్.

He went on to ridicule India's traditional education in *Kanyasulkam* where a Brahmin student was depicted as dropping his Pancha kaavya learning in favour of joining an English school. "...కింపురుపశ్చుచుంబ. ముద్దెట్టుకున్నాడట, ముక్కట్టుకున్నాడు కాదా ?" These derisive lines inserted by the playwright there actually reflect his own contempt for Indian system of schooling. Every country has and should have this sort of parallel or twin system of education. You need not insult one of them in support of another. But Gurazada woefully lacked the requisite commonsense, polish and culture to appreciate this fact. This bad culture is because "వారి విద్యలు కఱచి...."

Also, as for matters of patriotism, I curiously find that people tend to instal him on a high pedestal on par with the likes of Alluri Sitarama Raju who gave away his life for the nation. By his own hypocritical proclamation, "దేశమంటే మట్టి కాదోయ్, దేశమంటే మనుషులోయ్ "

But how come on earth a man like Gurazada so much filled with deep-seated contempt, hatred and negative bias against the fellow natives, their history, culture and traditional wisdom can become a patriot ? He set standards for the art of making fun of everything

Indian. He apparently never missed an opportunity to indulge in this unpatriotic vocation. Ever thought what good will come out of such persons for the nation ? Hypocrisy or contradictions in this man remain to be understood before anointing him as a star patriot notwithstanding a few sporadically appearing positive lines of his like : “దేశమును ప్రేమించుమన్నా, మంచి అన్నది పెంచుమన్నా” Like every other Telugu schoolboy, I too grew up listening to these lines over and again and, like every other schoolboy, I too was given to carrying an impression that the poet who wrote these lines must be a hardcore patriot. But I feel, lines such as these were blown out of proportion to elevate him in the public, while actually a corresponding depth of nationalistic spirit is conspicuous by its absence in his other writings.

The fact remains that he was hypersensitive to even the mildest criticism of the British empire, which he deemed to be an unpardonable crime. Note one particular instance of his intolerance of the patriots of the day and how he chose to threaten them in one of his English poems:

*Lives of moderates all remind us
We should wisely keep from crime
Open sedition only finds us
Shelter in a far off clime
Let us then line up and speaking
Speaking at a furious rate
Not always some benefit seeking
Learn to be loyal and to wait.*

Even now, we will be living under the British, had we taken this masterpiece of advice seriously.

Another thing I find very funny is - many in our country were tricked into identifying Gurazada with the movement of colloquial writing. It only shows how far the devotees of Gurazada went in desperately deifying that man and crediting him with pioneering a thing for which he was not at all responsible. In doing this, they did not hesitate to cover up a vast corpus of literary evidence available to the contrary. For example, *Kaasi majilee kathalu* which was originally written in the colloquial Telugu by Sri Madhira Subbanna Deekshitulu was contemporaneous to Kanyasulkam. Even Sri Kandukuri Veeresalingam employed colloquial Telugu in many of his plays. In fact, we find a number of South Indian Telugu works using colloquial speech for writing long before the afore-mentioned works appeared.

Gurazada is also very much useful as a convenient and potential weapon for every hue of Brahmin-haters to beat the soft community of Brahmins with, while the same discrepancies abound in all castes. His writings provided the much-needed fodder for the fire of anti-Brahminism in the society. His thoroughly one-sided negative depiction blocked all our sympathetic and insightful understanding of his contemporary Brahmin society. The Brahmin characters he wrote about were all confirmed rogues, scoundrels and rascals, or at times, absolute stupid, idiots and charlatans with the exception of a negligible few probably in whom he visualized himself. The man who did this is no more, but his witness remains the Gospel for all anti-Brahmin elements. His mediocrity would have

been long forgotten behind the dusty rusty rickety book shelves but for the perceived merits of his anti-Brahminism.

The Brahmins in those times were no villains, They had just wanted to continue as *Nitya agnihotris* (daily fire-worshippers). Huge age difference existed between husbands and wives in all castes in those days, not just among Brahmins. For the purpose of *Nitya agnihotram* (daily fire-worship), Brahmins compulsorily needed wives as per the vedic injunctions. But the consequences can not be blamed on them, as life-span was indeterminate in those days. Generally people assumed that they would live longer by the example of their forefathers, which, at times, proved otherwise.

For all the villainy portrayed of the Brahmins, people tend to conveniently forget the conditions of abject poverty in which the community lived in those days which actually compelled them to send their little ones away with over-age grooms. This poverty was actually imposed on them by the policies of the East India Company which used to confiscate the properties of Hindu monasteries and temples by an Act. Gurazada would have done well to go into the actual causes of bride price instead of glossing over these economic facts by wrongfully painting such parents as fairly well-to-do and greedy so that no one would have any sympathetic understanding of the real situation prevailing.

Blatant falsehoods laced with gigantic exaggerations appear to have been spread to justify this unfair and unrealistic portrayal of the-then Brahmin community, thereby highlighting Gurazada's contribution to tackling an essentially non-issue. In the film version of *Kanya sulkam* for instance, a 90-year old Brahmin was shown as the bridegroom for 14-year old Poornamma, in total oblivion of the fact that *Nitya agnihotris* were not such idiotic num-skulls to indulge such things. They were in fact, highly learned men in positions of public responsibility to teach good and bad to the people in their respective villages. Besides, unlike in the present times, they used to live in very big joint families and therefore, one could indulge in such a practice only at peril to one's own moral authority.

Bride price too existed in all communities, not just among Brahmins in those times, but with different nomenclatures. It was known with a Sanskrit term '*kanyaa sulkam*' among Brahmins and with a Telugu term *oli* among other communities. Then, why single out one particular community for his campaign of black painting ?

Note that he was the first native in the history of Andhra to don the mantle of the Christian missionaries in disparaging the Hindus in general and Brahmins in particular. You can understand clearly why he is celebrated with so much fanfare by all anti-Hindu and anti-Brahmin elements in this State. He had accomplished for them what they were unable to do themselves. The social devastation and disintegration wrought by his writings are permanent. The society he depicted no longer exists. But the anti-Brahminism and anti-Hindu sentiments and the consequent in-fighting among castes - all bred by him do still live on as vibrant forces. He was no reformer and not on record reforming anyone.

Someone can not be great just because he entertained you. Gurazada did really never bother to understand the top or bottom of anything or fight for anything in reality like Veeresalingam or Alluri Sitarama Raju. Fighters are known to incur the wrath of their

detractors and suffer their inquisitions. But whose wrath did Gurazada actually suffer in his life ? Given his own deeply ingrained fanatical sub-sectarianism, it was actually him who was in dire need of reform. Most of his sarcasm apparently stemmed from this personality trait, I believe. It makes his so-called self-identification with the underdog a plain eyewash as well as a hilarity. He just sat pretty in a corner busily blackening pieces of white paper. Caricaturing, lampooning, badmouthing and black-painting an entire community for years. Even genuine social reformers like Veeresalingam are laudable for their noble intentions. But, I believe nothing had happened on account of their efforts, Change in the society would have come anyway with or without them. Such was the force of the times.

Evidently, style can not vouch for someone's depth or nobility of his intentions. Fervently hope for the day when people stop worshipping and lionizing these false prophets and hate-mongers like Gurazada. Also, I pray for the day when people come to realize that society lies high above individuals, and that the genre of writings prejudicial to the long-term interests of national pride, social harmony and communal peace deserve to be discarded forthwith, notwithstanding thier explicitly stated lofty objectives or crafty style component. Making people like Gurazada a part of our curriculum, as is done at present, does untold harm to the cause of patriotism.

TADEPALLI LALITHA BALA SUBRAHMANYAM
20, September, 2012